

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 3495

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT BG
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: THE FINAL WEEK

REF: DACCA 3340

SUMMARY: THE CAMPAIGN CONTINUES TO BE OPEN AND, APPARENTLY,
FREE AS OPPOSITION CANDIDATES EXPRESSED THEIR OPINIONS
ON ZIA'S GOVERNMENT. A LEGAL CHALLENGE TO THE
CONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE ELECTION HAS BEEN REJECTED BY THE
HIGH COURT. THE FINAL WEEK OF THE CAMPAIGN HAS BROUGHT
SOME CHANGES FROM OSMANI THAT THE RESULTS OF THE POLLING
HAVE BEEN PRE-DETERMINED AND ALL EYES WILL BE ON THE
POLLING CENTERS JUNE 3RD. AN UNCHALLENGED ZIA VICTORY, AS
PREDICTED BY VIRTUALLY ALL LOCAL OBSERVERS, WOULD PRODUCE
FEW CHANGES IN THE SHORT RUN BUT WILL BRING QUESTIONS
LATER OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A STRONG PRESIDENT
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AND A "SOVEREIGN PARLIAMENT," WHICH ZIA HAS PROMOSSED
AFTER THE DECEMBER ELECTIONS. AN OSMANI VICTORY, SEEN
HERE AS QUITE UNLIKELY, WOULD BRING BUREAUCRATIC CONFUSION,,
AND OSMANI WOULD NO DOUBT HAVE GREAT TROUBLE DEALING WITH
HIS FRACTIOUS AWAMI LEAGUE COLLEAGUES. A THRID
ALTERNATIVE, OF COURSE, IS THAT ALLEGATIONS OF RIGGING
(WHETHER FALSE OR TRUE) COULD LEAD TO DOMESTIC TURMOIL AND

WHETHER IT COULD BE CONTAINED BY THE COERCIVE FORCES
AVAILABLE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HAS MOVED INTO ITS FINAL DAYS WITH BOTH CANDIDATES ADDRESSING HUGE RALLIES IN DACCA. AND STRESSING WELL-WORN THEMES. ZIA TOLD A RALLY OF WELL OVER TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND IN DACCA MAY 30 THAT IN ESSENCE ONLY HE REPRESENTED NATIONALISM AND SOVEREIGNTY, AND OSMANI BEFORE ABOUT 100,000 THE NEXT DAY AT THE SAME SITE (ACROSS FROM THE EMBASSY ON A FIELD ADJOINING THE STADIUM) PROMISED IF ELECTED TO RESTORE A SOVEREIGN PARLIAMENT. OSMANI HAS ALSO CHARGED THAT THE ELECTIONS WILL BE RIGGED AND HAS DECLARED THAT HE HAS AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT ORDERING SUCH A RESULT, BUT HE HAS NOT PRODUCED THE DOCUMENT. (N.Y. TIMES CORRESPONDENT TELLS US EACH SIDE HAS TOLD HIM IT FEARS RIGGING BY THE OTHER.) ZIA HAS REBUFFED OSMANI'S CHARGE BY POINTING OUT THAT HE HAS NOT MET WITH THE ELECTION COMMISSION OFFICIALS DURING THE CAMPAIGN. DESPITE THIS EXCHANGE, THE PROSPECTIVE FAIRNESS OF THE POLLING HAS NOT SO FAR BECOME A MAJOR ISSUE BUT IT IS A CONCERN OF WHICH ZIA HAS BEEN MADE WELL AWARE BY HIS ADVISORS AND AP ISSUE WHICH MIGHT BE EXPLOSIVE AFTERWARDS DEPENDING ON THE EFFICIENCY AND PROBITY OF THE BALLOT COUNTING.

2. THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN A RELATIVELY MILD AFFAIR (DESPITE SOME UNEXPLAINED DISRUPTIONS OF OSMANI'S MEETINGS) AS
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EACH OPPOSITION CANDIDATE HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO COMMENT FREELY ON ZIA'S MARTIAL LAW GOVERNMENT. LITTLE OF NOTE HAS BEEN HEARD FROM THE EIGHT MINOR CANDIDATES, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN SOME PRESS AND TELEVISION COVERAGE AND, AS REPORTED EARLIER, FREE TRANSPORT AND LODGING. OSMANI HAS CONDUCTED A CREDITABLE CAMPAIGN ALTHOUGH HAMPERED BY LACK OF ORGANIZING TIME AND MONEY AND HIS REFUSAL TO ACCEPT THE FREE TRANSPORT AND LODGINGS OFFERED BY THE BDG. HE ALSO CHARGED THAT THREE OF HIS WORKERS WERE KILLED IN CLASHES (THERE HAVE BEEN THE ALMOST USUAL REPORTS OF KILLING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE BUT THERE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN NO NOTICEABLE INCREASE DURING THE CAMPAIGN). MOST OF THE MAJOR AWAMI LEAGUE ORGANIZERS WHO HAD UNTIL RECENTLY BEEN IMPRISONED (SUCH AS RAZZAK AND TOFAIL AHMED) WERE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE, BUT THERE ARE STILL POLITICAL PRISONERS IN JAILS. THERE ARE RUMORS THAT THE AWAMI LEAGUE WILL TRY TO CAUSE AGITATION AFTER THE ELECTION IF THE RESULTS GIVE ANY APPEARANCE OF IMPROPRIETY, AND THE RESULTS MIGHT BE CHALLENGED IN THE COURTS. THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF HAS ALREADY SURVIVED ITS FIRST LEGAL CHALLENGE AS THE HIGH COURT MAY 31ST REJECTED A WRIT PETITION FROM THE AWAMI LEAGUE CHALLENGING THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE ELECTION. THE COURT RULED THAT

MARTIAL LAW AUTHORITY, UNDER WHICH THE ELECTION IS BEING HELD, SUPERCEDES THE 1972 CONSTITUTION. THE COURT REJECTED ATTEMPTS TO APPEAL THE DECISION. A RUMOR HAS ALSO BEEN PICKED UP THAT HINDUS MAY BE INTIMIDATED INTO VOTING FOR ZIA WITH DIRE CONSEQUENCES IF THEY DO NOT. (THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION HAS EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THIS TO THE BDG.) WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY AN OSMANI ORGANIZER, HOWEVER, THAT ZIA WILL FREELY GET MANY SCHEDULED CASTE HINDU VOTES, ALTHOUGH HIGHER CASTE HINDUS MAY WELL FOLLOW THE HISTORIC PATTERN OF VOTING WITH THE AWAMI LEAGUE, ESPECIALLY AS THE MUSLIM LEAGUE IS SUPPORTING ZIA.

3. A VICTORY BY ZIA, EXPECTED BY VIRTUALLY ALL OBSERVERS DESPITE THE LACK OF SCIENTIFIC OPINION SAMPLING, WOULD IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SHORT RUN MEAN BUSINESS AS USUAL. AN ELECTION MANIFESTO PUBLISHED ONLY TODAY (JUNE 1ST) BY ZIA'S JATIYATABADI FRONT CALLED FOR DEVELOPMENT UNDER GUIDANCE OF ZIA'S 19-POINT ECONOMIC PROGRAM FIRST AIRED IN LAST YEAR'S REFERENDUM. ZIA WOULD STILL BE FACED AFTER HIS VICTORY WITH A RESTLESS LOWER LEVEL BUREAUCRACY ONLY PARTIALLY MOLLIFIED BY THE WAGE CONCESSIONS GRANTED UNDER THE PRESURE OF THE CAMPAIGN. ZIA IS UNLIKELY TO TOLERATE STRIKES OR AGITATION AFTER THE CAMPAIGN AND MAY DISMISS THOSE WHO MAKE TROUBLE. A NEW LABOR POLICY, INCLUDING A WAGE STRUCTURE, WILL BE ANNOUNCED FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR WORKERS AFTER THE ELECTION, AND TO AVERT POSSIBLE TROUBLE (AS WELL AS TO AID ZIA'S CAMPAIGN), BDG HAS ANNOUNCED AN IMMEDIATE 300 TAKA LUMP SUM BONUS TO ALL WORKERS " AS PART OF THE ANTICIPATORY APPEARANCE OF WAGES." IN THE LONGER RUN, HOWEVER, RESOLVED. HE HAS PROMISED A SOVEREIGN PARLIAMENT AFTER THE DECEMBER ELECTIONS BUT NO PROVISION EXISTS TO RESOLVE DISPUTES BETWEEN PARLIAMENT AND THE PRESIDENT, WHO RETAINS COMPLETE AUTHORITY UNDER THE FOURTH AMENDMENT UNLESS IT IS AMENDED OR REPEALED. ZIA HAS PROMISED REVISION OF THE FOURTH AMENDMENT, BUT NOTHING SPECIFIC HAS BEEN PROPOSED.

. IN THE EVENT OF AN OSMANI VICTORY, THE COUNTRY WOULD LIKELY BE THROWN INTO CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION. OSMANI HAS PROMISED IMMEDIATE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS UNDER PROVISIONS OF THE 1972 CONSTITUTION. OSMANI WOULD NEED TO PUT TOGETHER AN ADMINISTRATION, WHICH WOULD NOT BE EASY GIVEN HIS TROUBLED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AWAMI LEAGUE, ITSELF DIVIDED INTO FACTIONS. OSMANI HAS NEVER DISCUSSED AN ECONOMIC PROGRAM (BUT HE IS ALSO UNHAMPERED BY HAVING MADE NO PROMISES). PROSPECTS OF AN OSMANI GOVERNMENT ARE PROBABLY ACADEMIC, HOWEVER. WHETHER THE ARMY WOULD ACT TO BLOCK AN OSMANI GOVERNMENT IS A QUESTION WHICH IS UNLIKELY TO REQUIRE ANSWER. CONFIDENTIAL

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5. A THIRD POSSIBILITY, IN ADDITION TO A CLEARCUT ZIA VICTORY OR A WIN BY OSMANI, IS THAT THE OSMANI SUPPORTERS WILL CLAIM (CORRECTLY OR FALSELY) THAT THE ELECTION WAS STOLEN BY ZIA AND BEGIN AN AGITATION AS OCCURRED IN PAKISTAN LST YEAR. PRESUMABLY, THE ARMY AND POLICE COULD CONTAIN SUCH ACTION BUT IT WOULD BE DISRUPTIVE TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS PROGRAMS.
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